

The Interplay of Influencer Marketing and Electronic Word of Mouth to Effect Consumer Purchase Decision

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ABSTRACT

Using opinion leadership theory and social influence theory as theoretical basis, this study investigates the role of electronic word of mouth (eWOM) on consumer purchase decision with influencer marketing as a moderator. Data is collected through structured questionnaire from 340 consumers of food sector of Kohat City of KP, Pakistan using convenient sampling. PLS-SEM path modeling is used to perform statistical investigation of the hypotheses. The statistical analysis indicates a positive and obvious relationship between eWOM and consumer purchase decisions. Since the information reviews and recommendation of the people online gives the clue to consumers, eWOM has a meaningful influence on consumer purchase decision. Moreover, statically it is observed that influencer marketing enhances (moderate) the link amid purchase decision and eWOM. So, if the recommendations and reviews provided to consumers are from individuals who consumer is following and who consumer holds in trust, enhances the likelihood of positive consumer purchase decision. It is implied that the effects of electronic word of mouth on purchase decision are significantly strengthened by the presence of influencers who act as opinion leaders. While these findings contribute to prior knowledge, it also has practical and managerial insinuations. The enquiry offers marketing procedures for this sort of digital word of mouth that leverage influencers to magnify the influence of eWOM on consumer decision of purchase.



Introduction

Consumers usually look for advices from any sources close by, and seek information on product before buying any product; either from other people or e-commerce websites (Gao, 2022). This is referred to as word of mouth (WOM). Bilal et al. (2021) defined that information furnished by the customers and their thoughts shared with other consumers regarding a brand or a product etc. constitute WOM. The process of deciding to make a purchase is multi- step. It means that there exists need, searching, gathering together and bringing in utilize of a couple of various data sources to assess different product choices and picking and buying the most suitable (Musay, 2013). WOM communication initial research about how it influences buying choice show that it takes part in customer's decision to purchase and being able to call for cautious purchase (McGriff, 2012). In today's technological world the spectrum of brand knowledge, availability of alternatives and sources of information has expanded. The internet has provided these technological advances which have led into major changes in the standards of how different generations live (Abraham et al., 2022). People who used to search for information before internet will search online for other consumers (Bilal et al., 2021). Thanks to visuals and aided by internet, consumers generate information based on their judgement regarding brands and their products and spread this through the internet quickly (Erkan & Evans, 2016). Electronic word of mouth (eWOM) is this consolidated information available online. Consumer created information are used by other consumer worldwide regarding products and relevant brands in the form of feelings, endorsements, video testimonials, criticism, commentaries, appraisals, pins, likes, blog posts and photographs on what they have liked and recommended on Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and TikTok are referred to as eWOM (Bilal et al., 2021). Online reviews, opinions and recommendations from other have become such an important part of creating consumer purchase decision. Brands have also suffered from this in terms of sales base and sales graph (Nisar et al., 2020). Consumers are losing interest in traditional advertising as a result of emergence of eWOM. As a result of this, brands prefer e-marketing utilizing the digital spaces and marketing influencers to create and build connection amid brand and consumers (Al-Halbusi et al., 2021). Consumer with better eWOM frequency, intensity and frequency of praising strong brands praise them with greater frequency and intensity, and the combination of eWOM and strong brands (brand strength) creates a strong social stimulus that relies on potential consumer deciding whether or not to make a purchase (Foxall, 2015).

Marketing influencers have also become important for brands by influencing the purchase decisions of their audiences (Wahab, Alam, & Lahuerta-Otero, 2024). Influencers in these electronic or social media promotions (also called vloggers) are also subject to binge favorable eWOM regarding brands. One of the imperative things about these stars is that they get to be an influencer because by having these stars, their followers get to know of their life and what type of brands they love to use in their routine. Foroughi et al. (2024) even give their followers advises on how to use and not to use some brands, even providing their fans. Influencer marketing is a form of marketing (De-Jans et al, 2019). Marketers also trend to use eWOM strategy alongside influencer advertising to effect consumer behavior. It is assumed that influencers with high trustworthiness and large number of followers are perceived as reliable intermediaries amid brands and consumer, rewarding eWOM with a higher effect on consumer's purchase decision. Influencer marketing is a quisling with people (influencers) who have huge follower base online and are famous in some online media (De-Veirman et. al 2017; Shafiq et al., 2023). Given these influencers are very credible, their followers have high confidence in influencers since their content are authentic and relatable (Plidtookpai & Yoopetch, 2021). Influencer marketing is a growing trend to be used in the marketing of the food sector. Influencer marketing is a significant

trend in the food industry, as food products are always reliant on the visual and experiential nature being seen and experienced. It is shown that as well as controlling consumer attitudes toward food related brands, influencer marketing positively influences consumer attitudes (Jin et al., 2019).

As a strategical move, the influencer marketing has received considerable attention to reach out to consumers and influence their purchase behavior. Previous research of eWOM's influence on buying decision has been mixed. Scholars have even argued whether it works. Rather than spread of positive consumer buzz, the consumer can decide to purchase brand products in the market is not due to binge of affirmative consumer buzz rather it can be other prior basis and brand positioning (Almeida et al., 2020). As a result, consumer will buy the brand if it has a good market brand position, made by marketing exertions irrespective of the eWOM being negative or positive about that brand (Almeida et al., 2020). Another group of scholars posits that eWOM is powerful enough to magnify the strength of brand's impact on user's choice to buy. Strong brand is taken by better and effective marketing techniques which leads to the fact that marketing practice of resilient brand is added effective and therefore create a safeguard of robust brand to shield its self from harmful eWOM. And in situation of feeble brand the situation is opposite (Severi et al., 2014). By combining these brand strengths and affirmative eWOM, they create communal spur that influence a probable consumer for purchasing from the brand (Foxall, 2015). In addition, researchers also assert that the buying of product or service and consumer decision to purchase is more from positive eWOM than negative eWOM (Casaló et al., 2015). Despite this, scholars identified that negative eWOM is a more influential factor than positive eWOM (Ladhari and Michaud, 2018; Sun et al., 2024). The influence of digital world reviews, feelings, and endorsements (eWOM) on decision to purchase is found to be strong for brand with strong brand as opposed to weak brand. However, scholars agree that eWOM favorably influence consumer buying decision.

Research has been conducted on eWOM and influencer marketing; however, knowledge is scarce in determining how the collective effect of influencer marketing and eWOM impacts purchase decision of consumer (Gupta & Harris, 2021). While there have been discrete enquiries illuminating some of these scenarios, studies from all-inclusive inquiries that go beyond industry precincts and specificity of platform are needed to add to the generalizability of the findings (Filieri, Acikgoz, & Alguezaui, 2023). In addition, the findings also suggest that eWOM found in platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, and blogs can provide a good opportunity for the brand to generate the knowledge of brand awareness to masses and to disseminate information through platform eWOM (Erkan & Evans, 2016). If the influence of online appraisals, endorsements and sentiments (eWOM) on buying choices is equated, variability among strong and weak brands can be observed. Despite this there is still limited research and previous literature concerning the influence of eWOM on consumers' decision making during purchase in Pakistan. As such, there is an immediate need for a more detailed research to investigate systematically the moderation role of influencer marketing in the connection amid eWOM and consumer purchase decision nexus in different settings (Kanaveedu & Kalapurackal, 2024). Food industry being equally important of eWOM and influencer marketing, this research attempted to discover how eWOM affects the consumer purchase decision in this industry. It is also examined that how influencer marketing moderates the association amid consumer purchase decision and eWOM. The accomplishment of these research intents will bring marketers information level to a peak in devising promotional plans and also will multiply businesses and stakeholder ability to discover new ways of spreading the info and get to max prospects as well as keep old customers. This knowledge will allow food sector to perform this with the options so as to create the last customer base for its own self in this digital era. From the academic perspective, this study is thus an

impoverished contribution to the academic literature in the area of consumer behavior as it combines two reasonably under researched areas.

Literature Review

Word of mouth

Whenever consumer takes a decision for purchasing anything, they often turn to the recommendations and opinions of family and friends. Word of mouth by other consumers is used to gather such information, the outcome is consumer engagement. This word of mouth communication encompasses relevant disclosure on different attributes of the product, views of shared promotional content about products/services, purchase suggestion regarding specific product and can only be simple recommendations and reviews of the stature and nature of the brand and which products it serves (Berger, 2014). In 2010, Kozinets et al put forward model to provide rationale to psychology and behavioral implication of WOM. Four important factors regarding its effect on consumer behavior or psychology are explained by research. Character narrative (personal long lasting and abiding stories), social and cultural norms of discourse, exchange of information and the characteristics of promotional campaign are these factors. Commercial promotion can initiative of WOM from valuable information to evidence that defined in a specific culture (Kozinets, et al., 2010). Other factors have been found in literature, such as satisfaction, confidence, relationship, commitment, devotion and sense of professed excellence the customer associates with particular product of some particular brand, which also spark the WOM communication (Borah et al., 2020). Negative WOM receiver and positive WOM receiver have faster change of view about brand. No matter what kind of business organization there is, they tend to participate in taking positive word of mouth either active or passive. Through comprehending and discovering the features of services and product, positive WOM can be initiated. With engaging celebrities followed by masses, brands can spread favorable WOM in the social space. Finally, through short-term nudges and prompts positive WOM can be encouraged, where consumers engage with one another in groups, and consumer prospects to self-present and be self-presented to others (Rosario et al., 2020).

Electronic word of mouth (eWOM)

Internet these days and social media have opened doors for many of us to enjoy from optimum virtual gatherings. These social media groups and communities have allowed the consumers to engage virtually and exchange potentially brand and product related views as well as recommendations too. EWOMs are referred to the distributing and getting endorsements and beliefs about brands and their goods or services online through digital media (Donthu et al. 2021). So, endorsements, opinions, and information are generated and shared on the internet. Electronic word of mouth (eWOM) is a new phenomenon to generating and spreading endorsements and opinions about products and services. With this novel method, consumers buying mechanisms and pattern for making buying decision have changed (Morton et al, 2015). The significance of this concept reveals that the providing of positive eWOM can develop a brand's positive image, and an image is likely to place a brand in positive reputation with consumers, subsequently producing a kind of high quality perception about brand in consumers. On the contrary, negative eWOM will cause consumers to perceive low quality about brand. However, this rationale implies that eWOM considerably effect brand image (Jasin, 2022). In prior research, scholars categorized eWOM in four distinct categories. There are four class specialized, affiliated, social and miscellaneous. The spread of opinions, information, and endorsements on Facebook, Instagram, telegram etc. is

termed as social eWOM (Hu and Ha, 2015). Social eWOM is unique in that it has deliberate and known set of audience, degree of trust that the audience befits to spread the eWOM to them and evaluation of the source where the eWOM is spreading occurs, and lastly the degree of interpersonal relationship between the senders and the receivers of eWOM. Social eWOM is not only used to spread information but also encourage belonging (Kim & Lee, 2019). Distribution and reception of information has a big influence on purchase choice and behavior (Aaskell & Gupta-Aggarwal, 2022). Brands and companies use EWOM to bring their existence in social media, to have a response contrivance amid brand and their customer. EWOM has made consumer generalize and more knowledgeable and informed, and delegated the control of making decision from brands to the consumer. The purchaser now has the authority to be exposed or not to a certain promotional activity in a single touch paradigm (Assaker & O'Connor, 2021). EWOM has provided consumers with the ability to make more informed and cautious decision. Previous literature indicates that of the eWOM impact on a consumer behavior, intention and direction on decision to purchase would continue to rise with technological development (Nilashi et al., 2022).

Consumer Purchase Decision (CPD)

Customer decision of purchase is the process of determining the need, searching, gathering, and assessing information to appraise prospects and choosing one of them for acquisition (Musay, 2013). It is process where individual (consumer) approaches directly to someone, who produces service/product and make purchase decision (Indah et al 2022). It begins with need appreciation, searching information, assessment of substitutes, choice of greatest suitable option, deciding for purchase and assessment of post-purchase decision. Whenever consumers have to go through a purchase decision of acquiring variety of products and/or services, they go through this process. In the view of Kotler (2000) consumer buying process has five steps. In the first place, the issue of product or service acquisition is recognized or the problem is identified. Second, the information on different alternative that can respond to need identified or that can address a problem known is looked for and retrieved. Comparison of different identified alternatives is the third step. In the fourth step, the alternative which is the best suitable is purchased after taking the final purchase decision. Evaluation of decision after purchase is the fifth step. Liu et al. (2021) suggest that purchase intention is important to study before purchase decision as purchase intention will ultimately determine purchase decision. Consumer both gathers information of retailer from eWOM or browsing online and comparing different options available or retailer gathers information of consumer (Gkikas et al., 2022). Sometimes, though, the consumer and retailer both can pursue and have this requisite information, mined from figures or cookies (Ilham et al., 2023). In some cases, these interactions of consumer and retailers between the two online themselves. Better to manage these interactions so that retailer can build healthy relationship with consumer.

Electronic Word of Mouth and Purchase Decision

Existing literature has found a great impact of eWOM on purchasing decision. The correlation of eWOM with consumers' intention to purchase has been established by literature (Demirbaş, 2018). When users of some product or after getting of some service they can share their opinion in this regard on venues of social media virtually disseminating opinions effect customer choice for purchase (Lui et al., 2021). The development of digital technologies and publicity of the venues of social media has changed the ways in which opinion and recommendations can propagate about products. The subtleties of purchase decision behavior and the planning of companies has altered now (Kwon et al., 2021). Today consumers' information regarding brands and services/product has bigger. Different options to market are also provided to consumers. Consumer searches for more

information online before making a purchase decision, analyze one benefit-cost graph of available alternatives and short list the best amongst competing brands (Sharma et al., 2021). Researchers postulate that consumers' beliefs of their credibility are higher for reviews and recommendations posted by other consumers than information being advocated by brands and marketers through promotional activities (Kwon et al., 2021). The utilization of social media websites and applications lets the companies to involve the customer with eWOM, so that they can interact with the customers and can develop healthy relationship between the two, which can influence their purchase behavior. According to Prasad et al, (2019) eWOM from digital venues increases the favorable likelihood of consumer purchase attitude. Therefore, it is hypothesized that:

H1: Electronic word of mouth positively influence consumer purchase decision.

Influencer Marketing

Identification of such people, who can influence in a society, and thus, act as influencer marketing is influencer marketing. The influencer marketers are when such brands and their offerings are endorsed and a word spreads by such opinion leaders and is followed and listened to then such a phenomenon is identified as influencer marketing (WOMMA, 2017). Scholars define viral marketing as a type of tactic used by Marketer in persuade consumers in a positive way in attitude, behavior and intention toward purchasing decision which often does by turning social celebrities up to asserted brands to endorse. Positive spread of eWOM on social media such as those influencers molds behavior, attitude and intention (Xiao et al, 2018). Influencer marketing as a whole is not new, it is just the latest version of it. Previous literature review revealed that to disseminate information, early in 1950s, information is spread to people known as opinion leaders at the society. According to an innovation diffusion model, this is a concept of opinion leadership. Opinion leaders can easily remove innovation dissemination impediments and blockades for espousal of novel innovations and technology, according to innovation diffusion model (Valente et al, 1999). Society considers influencers as those people who control emotions and public opinion. They are thought of having power in reordering consumers' behavior in the purchase decision element (Valente et al, 2007). Social media influencer marketing has become popular thanks to social media platforms including Facebook, Instagram, TikTok. This is procedure where a brand obtains and compensate an ECIN to market its offerings to their followers and also spread beneficial eWOM concerning the brand (Leung, Gu, & Palmatier, 2022). Research in recent literature has shown that influencers share their experiences and opinions about offers of various brands and thereby influence a buyer's decision making of a bought item from a potential customer (Xiao, et al, 2018). Opinion leader or influencer is who has significantly more impact with masses than common person. Having stars from the entertainment sector has some uniqueness in it which makes those stars perfect for specific gathering for whom they are attempting to connect. An Influencer should be trust worthy and credible enough to be followed by (Jin et al., 2020). If influence is a specialist and expert of a particular field, the power and control of an influencer over the fans is strengthened and increased (Breves et al., 2019). High level of inputs and feedback in the form of influence is required between the influencer and the targeted customers in order for the marketing process to work and bring effective persuasion (Glucksman, 2022). It must be capable to relate to the situation and tastes of targeted audiences. masses will only now notice influencer, listen to it, and follow it (Glucksman, 2022).

The Moderating Role of Influencer Marketing

Study shows that characteristics of influencer marketing posts and sources makes it to significantly affect results of marketing process, such as consumers' engagement rate, consumer attitude and

behavior, and whether consumer intention leads to purchase behavior (Jin & Ryu, 2023). We note that the kind of celebrity usually involved in social media influencers is someone with not many following base and non-reach to media as compared to mainstream celebrity. However, from an apparently different angle of the influence on the decision making process instead of celebrities, it is clear that social media influencers by all means influence people more (Djafarova et al., 2017; De-Veirman et al., 2017). Influencers on social media just started with the beginning of likes and curiosity of a trifling group and they are maintaining the daily relationship with same group of people through vlog, post and discussion hall and making them part of their daily routine sharing daily things via all possible social media. It is generally about social media influencers who are experts in a particular a field, and hence are valued opinions pertaining to that field (Pedroni, 2016). Sharing of content on a regular basis and daily communication of influencer with the audience will surely built strong social connection and trust between influencer and his follower. It acts as a moderator to the spread of eWOM by influencer to his followers regarding the brand and its offering giving greater persuasive power to the marketing message. The more a fan from the influencer, the more engagement and this makes a consumer to consciously or unconsciously made decision to purchase based on endorsement of the opinion leader (Tafeese & Wood 2021). The way how they are usually confused is eWOM is actually the concepts of influencer marketing is that. In previous literature, opinion and recommendation spread via internet via opinion leader through eWOM—message while process is influencer marketing (Berger & Schwartz 2011). It was clearly found that the audience will trust with more information over brand and its offer when it comes from the opinion leader rather than the celebrity or brand advertisement (Listiawati et al., 2024). In short, those influencers with whom the audience can identify, who are providing trustworthy and credible assumptions and additions, can spread eWOM further and have better effect. eWOM share this quality content among their followers again and again, and its reach is increased automatically (Hughes & Zhang, 2021). Social media influencers are successful, talented, attractive, trustworthy credible and sensible. Everyone liked and followed these characteristics of influencers. That's why, their followers are admired, praised and sought to be like them, so pay attention to them. Therefore, it is hypothesized that:

H2: *Influencer marketing has a significant moderating role in the association amid eWOM purchase decision of consumer.*

Theoretical Foundation

Social influence theory (SIT): This shows that people influence each other man to man (or other similar) in the society. The effects are much more important in the uncertain situation (Cialdini, 2021). The implications of this theory to the influence of eWOM on consumer purchase decision are in favor. In this digital age, information to be collected is online reviews, opinions and recommendations (Ladhari & Michaud, 2018). Theory of social influence suggests that people's opinions get affected by the people around them and these opinions and influence from these normative and information influence consumer purchase process (Cialdini, 2021). When consumers imitate the verdict of the social media or the digital groups and follow or discard a product, it is called normative influence. On the other hand, such kinds of informational influence taking place when a consumer either assent or castoff a brand since the individual endorsing the brand is skillful in their area or has utilized the brand personally (Filieri et al., 2020). The effect of consumer behavior associated with the electronic word of mouth was supported by previous studies which linked the social Influence theory. Past literature review suggest that consumers will have a higher chance of trust a certain brand and buy from it when they have been exposed to positive eWOM (Ladhari & Michaud, 2018). The social proof concept, due to the endorsement of

SIT, proposes that if people observe that several others are posing the brand through affirmative eWOM, individuals are expected to buy the same type of brand through similar purchase behavior (Xu et al., 2021).

Theory of Opinion Leadership: Opinion leadership theory is based on the proposition that there are specific members of social network, referred to as Influencers (opinion leader), who have obvious influence on attitudes and thoughts of others. But these leaders are almost always better informed, more engaged, more connected to their communities, which makes sense as they can better spread information and help set public opinion. According to opinion leadership theory, electronic media opinion leaders (influencers) act as mediators amid digital media and the people by being an important constituent in the dissemination of innovations and contents (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955). Many opinion leaders of today rise today and they are often influencers on social media, using their following to both spread the message and sway an opinion. Although little is known about the identity of these so called "digital opinion leaders" (influencers), studies have found that they influence user success and electronic word of mouth (eWOM). Academics such as Casaló et al. (2020) show how influencer trustworthiness and excellence of content both increase customer commitment, and eWOM respectively on venues of social media. Furthermore, in his paper, De-Veirman, Hudders and Nelson (2019) explain that the influence power of an influencer lies mainly in the said influencer's ability to persuade his audience to change his viewpoint and behave in certain ways as a result. For this research, opinion leaders are the influencers, who could mold followers' perception and purchase decisions via electronic word of mouth (eWOM).

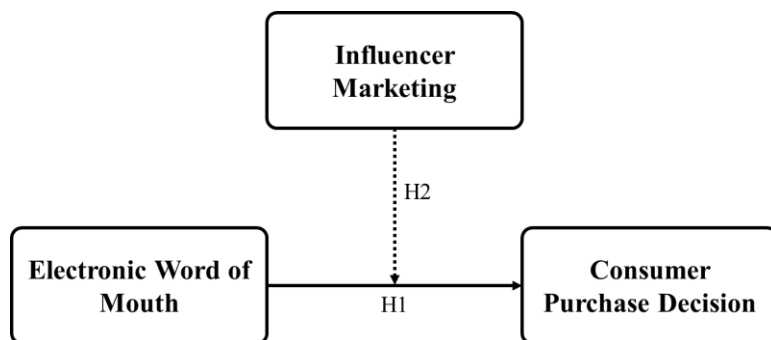


Figure 1: Conceptual Model

Methods

Research Design and Procedure

The deductive approach on which this research is based works by deriving hypothesis based on some already existing theory that is later tested via empirical means (Saunders et al. 2016). Theories on how eWOM and influencer marketing would impact a consumer's purchase decision have been verified using deductive reasoning. The study is descriptive. It is adopting mono method quantitative methodology. Data collection and analysis is conducted using mono-method quantitative method, wherein single strategy is utilized for quantitative data gathering relating to analysis technique. Survey strategy align with quantitative method and deductive approach that is why this investigation preferred survey strategy. This research chooses the cross sectional time frame, as it is best suited for this research. As respondents' identification were unavailable the longitudinal approach was not suitable (Saunders et al., 2016).

Population and Sample

The population of this research was the residents of Kohat city KP Pakistan. Research used a non-probabilistic sampling method: convenience sampling. In particular, for this research, it is most suited to non-probabilistic sampling such as convenience sampling, since it was quantitative, deductive and descriptive in its nature. This sampling was suitable for research to collect on data by voluntarily accessible set of respondents and descriptive research to comprehend and pronounce a phenomenon in spite of generalizations of results (Etikan, Musa, & Makassim, 2016). Sample size was computed to be 170 in accordance with the recommendations forwarded by Kline (2005) and Hair et al. (2017) to be 10-20 per parameter. To counter the inadequate responses and non-responses, sample size was set to be two-fold. For this reason, 340 surveys were disseminated. Table 1 presents demographics of study respondents.

Measures

For measurement of the focal constructs validated and standardized measures were adopted from prior literature and no major changes were incorporated.

Electronic word of mouth (eWOM): To evaluate Electronic Word of Mouth a scale constituted of 6 items, was adopted from Bambauer-Sachse and Mangold (2011).

Consumer Purchase Decision: To assess purchase decision, a scale constituted of 4 items, was adapted from Adam and Akber (2016).

Influencer Marketing: To measure influencer marketing, a scale comprised of 7 items, was adapted from Sudha and Sheena (2017).

Opinions and responses of participants for all the scales items were assessed based on scale from 1 to 5, where 1 represented strong disagreement, 2 showed disagreement, 3 indicated neutrality, 4 depicted agreement, and 5 designated strong agreement.

Table 1
Samples Demographics

Demographic Variables	Group	Occurrence	Percentage
Gender	Male	133	39.1%
	Female	207	60.9%
Age (Years)	18-25	181	53.2%
	26-32	67	19.4%
	33-39	86	25.6%
	40 and above	6	1.8%
	Non-response	0	0
Qualification	Inter	33	9.7%
	BS	185	54.4%
	MS/MPhil	106	31.2%
	PhD	16	4.7%
Income	30-50k	182	53.3%

	51-70k	80	23.5%
	71-90k	34	10%
	90k and above	44	12.9%
Occupation	Business	20	5.9%
	Service	88	25.9%
	Students	151	44.4%
	Others	81	23.8%

Notes: N=340

Data Analysis and Results

For the analysis of data, smart PLS 3 software was used to analyze with the help of partial least square structural equation modeling (PLS- SEM). In the social sciences data analysis, PLS- SEM is the utmost common expedient and advance procedure. The two basic segment of analysis in PLS-SEM are measurement model assessment and structural model assessment. First phase is used to measure validity and reliability of constructs. Evaluation on measurement model specification phase takes into account indicator loading, composite reliability, discriminant and convergent validity. The next phase, structural model assessment, involves testing the hypothesis using path coefficients to test hypothesis is one of the phase.

Screening and evaluation of the data

Data was prepared through SPSS 25 and then screened and were supplied to analysis of the measurement and structural models with SmartPLS. This procedure was followed to calculate descriptive statistics, generate correlation matrix, verify normality of the distributions, check for associating the variables of study through linearity assessment and scrutinize occur outliers.

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

Descriptive statistics (minimum, maximum, mean values, standard deviation, skewness and kurtosis) were computed for study variables. Table 2 summarizes the results. The range of eWOM was from 1.00 to 5.00, with a mean of 3.77. The mean of Influencer marketing was 3.468, and ranged from a minimum of 1 and maximum of 4.86. Consumer purchase decision mean happened to 3.501 from minimum 1.00 to maximum 5.00. Table 2 presents the results of correlation analysis also. The results indicated positive correlation between eWOM and a consumer's purchase decision indicating the connection between dependent and independent variables. Further, potent positive correlation – that of moderating variable i.e. influencer marketing – was present in the correlation analysis outcomes.

Table 2
Descriptive statistics and Correlations

	Min	Max	Mean	S.D.	Skewness	Kurtosis	1	2
1. EWOM	1.00	5.00	3.775	0.902	-0.987	0.389		
2. IM	1.00	4.86	3.468	0.787	-0.663	0.092	.431**	
3. CPD	1.00	5.00	3.501	0.885	-0.396	-0.186	.573**	.597**

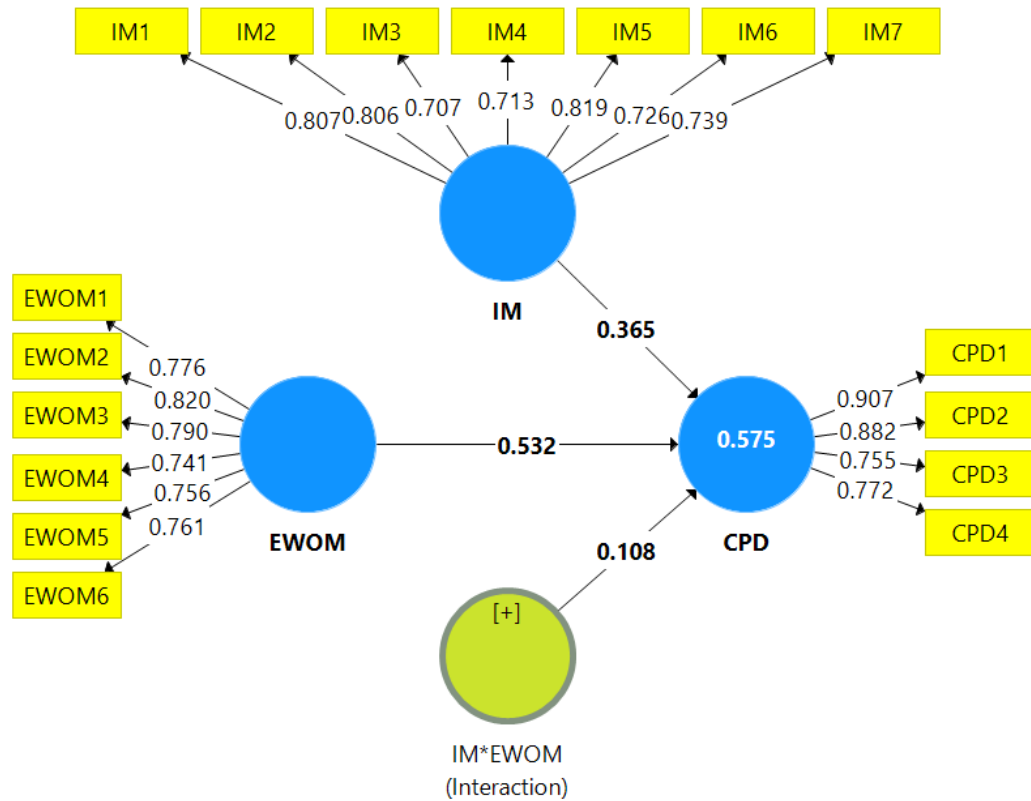


Figure 2: Measurement Model

Measurement Model Assessment

Indicator loadings, Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability were used to measure the reliability of the measurement model for the evaluation of the measurement model. Average Variance Extracted (AVE) and Fornell-Larcker criterion and HTMT ratios were utilized to assess discriminant validity and convergent validity. There are t statistics and significance (i.e. reliability) as calculated by bootstrap procedure with 5000 sub-sample. Table 3 and Figure 2 presents the items loading to their respective constructs. The indicators were observed to be significantly contributing to the underlying constructs. Loading of all the indicators surpassed the threshold of 0.708 (Ringle et al., 2020; Hair et al., 2017).

Cronbach alpha and composite reliabilities took values between 0.84 and 0.88 (Table 3) and 0.89 and 0.90 respectively. Values were acceptable and consistent with previous literature. The optimum value of AVE is also ≥ 0.50 . Convergent validity was evidenced from AVE values ranged from 0.692 to 0.579. The Fornell-Larcker test and HTMT Ratios of correlations (Table 4) were also used to test discriminant validity in a similar way.

Table 3
Indicators Loading

Constructs	Indicators	Loadings	T Statistics	P Values	CA	CR	AVE
Electronic Word of Mouth	EWOM1	0.776	38.763	0.000	0.867	0.900	0.600
	EWOM2	0.820	57.664	0.000			
	EWOM3	0.790	80.962	0.000			
	EWOM4	0.741	77.586	0.000			
	EWOM5	0.756	47.215	0.000			
	EWOM6	0.761	24.338	0.000			
Influencer Marketing	IM1	0.807	55.65	0.000	0.882	0.906	0.579
	IM2	0.806	28.135	0.000			
	IM3	0.707	27.045	0.000			
	IM4	0.713	28.975	0.000			
	IM5	0.819	41.789	0.000			
	IM6	0.726	23.604	0.000			
	IM7	0.739	26.335	0.000			
Consumer Purchase Decision	CPD1	0.907	27.23	0.000	0.849	0.899	0.692
	CPD2	0.882	27.762	0.000			
	CPD3	0.755	39.762	0.000			
	CPD4	0.772	47.807	0.000			

Table 4
Discriminant Validity

	Fornell-Larcker Criterion			HTMT Ratios	
	CPD	EWOM	IM	CPD	EWOM
CPD	0.832				
EWOM	0.714	0.774		0.800	
IM	0.673	0.738	0.761	0.715	0.809

Structural Model Assessment

Measurement model evaluation leads to satisfactory and optimum structural model evaluation. Results (Table 5, Figure 3) show that eWOM does significantly induce ($\beta=0.532$, $t=12.896$, $p<0.001$) consumer purchase. This therefore supports hypothesis 1. Electronic word of mouth (eWOM) positively influences buyer's decision to make a purchase. The results of this investigation agree with Mensah and Mwakapesa (2022), Pillay (2021), Plidtookpai (2021) and Purwanto (2022), who indicated that electronic word of mouth has positive impact on consumer decision to purchase. Next, the result showed that influencer marketing moderate the relation between eWOM and consumer purchase decision ($\beta = 0.108$, $t = 5.308$, $p<0.001$). Hence H2 is also supported. The outcomes of this investigation align with Ho et al. (2021), Haudi et al. (2022), Krishnamurthy et al. (2018) who found positive moderation influence of Influencer Marketing in the association amid

eWOM and consumer purchase decision. A satisfactory R^2 values of endogenous construct were found in the coefficient of determination (R^2) value. The values computed for F^2 effect size indicated influence as the value was more than 0.15 which is an apparent influence. It was also observed that Q^2 value was greater than zero, indicating predictive relevance of the model.

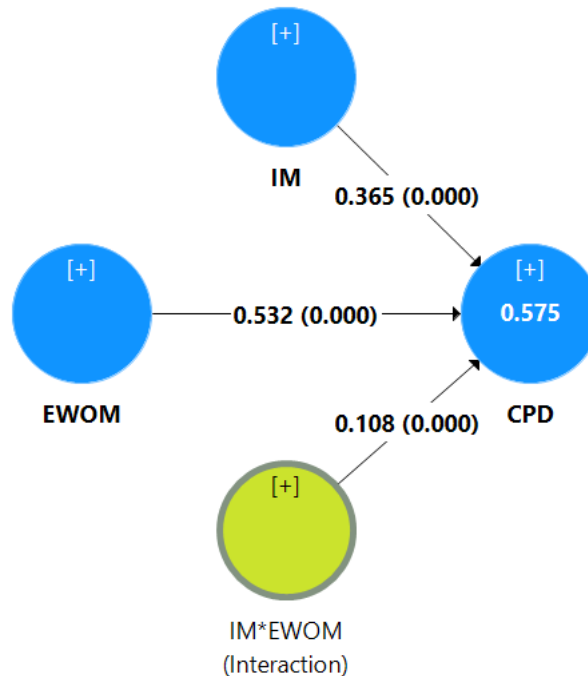


Figure 3: Structural Model

Table 5

Path Coefficients and Hypothesis results

Hypotheses	Paths	Coefficient	T Statistic	CI		R2	F2	Q2	
				LL	UL				
H1	EWOM→CPD	0.532**	12.896	0.454	0.611	0.575	0.281	0.369	Supported
	IM→CPD	0.365**	8.975	0.285	0.446	0.575	0.136	0.369	
H2	IM*EWOM→CPD	0.108**	5.308	0.071	0.148	0.575	0.044	0.369	Supported

Discussion of Results

Today is an era with internet based online sites that act as an influential space for consumer interaction and brand engagement, and therefore, understanding how eWOM relates to influencer marketing is critical for businesses that want to capture more and more of the customer base and gain an advantage in the market. Traditional marketing approaches have been changed by electronic word of mouth whereas influencer marketing has emerged as a prominent scheme for the businesses to build connection with the possible consumers over genuine online figures who have considerable number of followers. This research investigated the way these elements congregate and impact upon the consumer behavior. The results confirmed the effects of the electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) on consumer purchase decisions. This work conforms to recent

theoretical and empirical progress in the literature. Theory of Social Influence supports the idea that people make their purchase decisions greatly influenced by other people's opinions, mainly in the digital environment (Goldsmith & Horowitz, 2020). Guidance for a purchase decision comes increasingly more from online reviews in an era of digital consumers. Day by day the purchasing decisions of the people are being influenced by this eWOM (Zeithaml 2022). The positive relation shows that the more positive eWOM is, the more people have the prospect of buying product. This study finds the findings in line with a number of contemporary researches that studied the influence of eWOM with respect to consumer buying decision taking practice. Matzler et al. (2017) revealed that affirmative online review contributes positively to modify consumer attitudes in terms of products positively thriving purchase intention and finally leading to choice of purchase of that product. Consumer Trust from positive eWOM leads to purchase likelihood (Lee et al. 2020). Previous literature is consistent with the current study's findings, which is that eWOM is instrumental in getting a consumer to buy a product, as previous literature and current study indicates. Results of previous literature and recent study were congruent in observers that eWOM positively effects consumer purchase decision. This study's results offer support to the hypothesis that the relation amid electronic word of mouth (eWOM) and customer purchase decisions is moderated by influencer marketing. First, results demonstrate that influencer marketing increases the efficacy of eWOM and extends the reach of eWOM to influence the purchase decision. eWOM is greatly amplified by it. This finding provides insight into the increasing significance of influencers within the digital marketing landscape and mechanisms which lay out how eWOM and positive alignment of eWOM with influencers influence consumer behavior, in turn influencing consumer purchase decision.

The theory of opinion leadership is related with the moderation of influencer marketing in the relation amid eWOM and consumer purchase decision. Those that highlight the role played by online influencers (digital personalities with wide presence in the digital world and large followership), in determining how people perceive, as well as behave. More persuasive messages are accompanied by credible and attractive influencers (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). eWOM can be strengthened with influencers, who already have credibility and follower base, to further strengthen consumer purchase behavior (MacLean & Haugh 2021). Furthermore, outcomes are in alignment with the Social Influence theory as well. According to Cialdini and Goldstein (2004), people tend to be more prone to information from those they believe are similar to themselves, who they like, who they follow, or whose social authority they have. These criteria also make influencers good targets for eWOM in combination with their endorsement. The presence of this interaction effect further underscores the fact that influencers can heighten the positive consequences of eWOM and thereby serve as an increasingly powerful driver of consumer purchase decisions (MacLean & Haugh, 2021). Recent studies which characterize influencers' role in tampering the impact of eWOM on consumer purchase decision, are corroborated by the results of study. eWOM on social media is driven by the credibility and charisma of influencers and consumer spends more time on social and digital media as it becomes a more effective vector. This engagement of the consumer on Media makes an influencer expose his Message that he wants to deliver and he can shape the consumer purchase behavior accordingly (De-Veirman et al., 2017). As in Lou and Yuan (2019), the study also show that influencer marketing is particularly effective in enhancing the moderating role of online reviews on consumer decisions. Influencer content alignment with eWOM can synergistically increase consumer trust and perceived value which influences consumer online purchases (Djafarova and Trofimenko, 2021). These findings are extended to quantitatively test that influencer marketing positively moderates the relationship between EWOM and consumer purchases.

Implications of the Study

By integrating Social Influence Theory (SIT) and Opinion Leadership Theory (OLT), this research investigates the nature of electronic word of mouth (eWOM) and influencer marketing dynamics. These findings echo SIT's argument that people evaluate purchase decisions in uncertain situations based on others' opinions, not just factual information. What's more, the moderating job of influencer marketing highlights how OLT is significant since influencers performing as digital opinion leaders magnify the persuasive power of eWOM. The combination of influencer and eWOM advances theoretical discussion of consumer behavior, especially in the digital ecosystem. This research underscores the evolving nature of marketing communication by combining SIT and OLT to convey the co creation of value for businesses by digital influencers and eWOM.

Results highlight the point that companies should promote positive reviews and engage customers online. Additionally, you can mitigate damage from potential reputation consequences and increase your company's overall brand authenticity by implementing reputation management strategies and attending to negative feedback constructively. From a practical perspective, these results have several implications for marketers. Therefore, if we take into account the fact that influencer marketing can greatly enhance the effects of eWOM, then businesses should also take on influencer strategies in their digital marketing. EWOM's credibility will be increased and potency enhanced if there is collaboration between the influencers and the brand, where there is alignment between the values of the brand and influencer's values. In addition, marketers should also use their endorsements to choose influencers who are genuinely connected to their target audience.

Limitations and future directions

Although 340 participants are sufficient, a sample larger than this might have generated clearer and general findings. All the demographic characteristics of the target population which may affect the dependent and independent variables as well as interaction effect could not be captured. The findings of this study are built on cross sectional time horizon. Swift moving characteristic of influencer marketing and social media, means it is possible to conduct a longitudinal study which will allow collection of changes in consumers' behavior over time. It would allow insights in to the long term impact of sustained eWOM and influencer marketing on consumer purchasing attitudes behavior. While this study has examined the moderation influence of influencers marketing on consumer's decision to purchase, this research has not identified and classified diverse kinds of influencers. Subsequent enquiry might focus on the capricious effects of various types of influencers (e.g., macro, micro and nano-influencers). Future research may address the collaboration amid eWOM and customer buying decision, on the interaction of eWOM with additional possible moderating variables, for example, consumer trust or reliance on social media avenues, loyalty with brands etc. and the type of products offerings. More practical insights are provided by addition of other moderation factors. This research, however, focused on the effects of how eWOM spread through social media influence, and how it influences the purchase decision. It was a general focus, but without much specification to a particular platform. The features, demographics of the users, and engagement patterns, social media platforms are different. Future research could delve in to how eWOM and influencer marketing engage consumers differently in the context of different platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, and Facebook, with each platform having potential to influence consumer behavior leading up to consumer purchase decision.

Conclusions

Finally, this study shows that eWOM has a positive effect on consumer purchase decisions. These findings fit into existing literature and underscore the critical role of online reviews, or electronic word of mouth (eWOM), in consumer behavior. With the growing prevalence of eWOM, businesses need to adjust their strategies in order to effectively connect with that mechanism of communication and increase their position in the marketplace. The hypothesis that influencer marketing moderates the influence of eWOM on consumer purchasing decisions is accepted by the study as well. This matches contemporary works and highlights the significant part of influencers in further expanding eWOM impression. If digital marketing endures to transform, capitalizing in influencer marketing successfully will be crucial to making eWOM stratagems working in the most efficient way possible and digging consumer deeper in an eWOM strategy.

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